



For Immediate Release
September 19, 2017

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Henry Vilas Zoo's Arctic Passage Recognized with Top Honors Award for Exhibit Design

MADISON, Wis., September 19, 2017 – The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) announced that the Henry Vilas Zoo has received “Top Honors” in AZA’s 2017 Exhibit Design Award for annual operating budgets under \$5 million for its Ray Kubly Family *Arctic Passage* exhibit.

“This award is the highest honor in exhibit design, and recognizes the Henry Vilas Zoo for their dedication and expertise in designing a novel, immersive habitat that provides the best in animal care and welfare as well as a superior educational experience for visitors,” said AZA President and CEO Dan Ashe.

With its annual Exhibit Award, AZA recognizes excellence by an AZA-accredited Institution (US or International) or Related Facility member in the areas of exhibit design and providing visitors with the opportunity to engage in observing and learning about the animals.

“It is so exciting to see the Henry Vilas Zoo honored on the national stage for its outstanding *Arctic Passage* exhibit,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “This recognition highlights the Zoo’s dedication to providing comprehensive exhibits that educate our guests and feature superb habitats for our animals. The AZA’s award will only further motivate our conservation and environmental education efforts at the Zoo.”

As a no-charge zoo constantly looking for ways to improve revenue and guest service, the Zoo also constructed its first ever indoor restaurant to complement the exhibit. The restaurant, the Glacier Grille, offers guests the unique experience of looking onto the polar bear yard while dining. Dane County paid \$1.9 million to design and build the indoor dining area.

“The Henry Vilas Zoo has always been a community-supported zoo. We are so grateful to the community for helping us raise the funds to complete this award-winning exhibit and helping us continue to transform the Zoo,” said Friends of the Zoo Executive Director Alison Prange.

The completion of the ground-breaking *Arctic Passage* exhibit at the Henry Vilas Zoo transformed 1.7 acres of land and outdated exhibits into state-of-the-art habitats that allow for visitors to connect directly to the animal residents that call *Arctic Passage* home. The *Arctic Passage* exhibit has been transformative for the community and the Zoo, which has served over 830,000 visitors a year since the opening of the exhibit.

“The Henry Vilas Zoo has a long history of connecting guests and animals. We are proud to provide a family focused destination at no cost for over 100 years,” said Ronda Schwetz, director of the Henry Vilas Zoo. “Arctic Passage is truly the cornerstone of excellence in animal care and welfare for the Henry

Vilas Zoo and an example of our commitment to conservation and education well into the next century. We are excited to share our vision with our community and inspire them to help conserve our natural resources.”

Completed in 2015, The *Arctic Passage* exhibit was built to grow the Zoo’s cold weather species collection and provide habitats for polar bears, grizzly bears and harbor seals. The exhibit added a breeding space for the Zoo’s polar bears – (an increase of 100% in space), and allowed for a significantly improved space for the Zoo’s harbor seals. The exhibit cost approximately \$9 million, with Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo raising \$4.6 million and Dane County funding \$4.38 million.

The *Arctic Passage* project not only provides the best possible care and habitat for its animal residents, but also connects guests directly to the animals, their story and the importance of conservation both of animals and the environment.

Collaborative partners included Polar Bears International (PBI), Frontiers North, Polar Bear Species Survival Plan (SSP), Dane County Executive Office, County Board, and Public Works and Zoo Commissioners.

The construction/consultation companies for the exhibit are listed below.

Design and Landscape Architects: WDM Architects
General Contractor: JP Cullen & Sons Construction
Interpretive Design: AFH Design

About AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and seven other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.

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